



Julie Oduber-Quigley

"Aruban Landscape", 1997

Collection G.Oduber, Aruba

It's no secret. The Aruban landscape has more in common with the beautiful New Mexico, Arizona or Spanish desert plains than with the green, hilly views of other Caribbean islands. But despite its small size and mostly semi-arid environment, Aruba still offers an unexpected variation of landscape types. One can roughly divide up the island along its length in a northern coastal area, a central area, and a southern coastal area. The northern coastal area is a dry, rocky stretch interrupted by beautiful sandy bays, where impressive powerful waves have been thundering against an ancient volcanic coast forever. This is a landscape straight out of the beginning of the formation of our planet, where raw nature makes you feel very, very small.

The central area consists of hilly areas, dry on the windward side and teeming with cacti and world-famous wind-bent *divi-divi* trees on the leeward side. The typical Aruban houses with their wind-swept gardens, colorful bougainvillea flowers and bright-yellow blooming agave plants create a picturesque landscape. This area is also dotted with huge five-story boulders and cactus jungles where wild goats and

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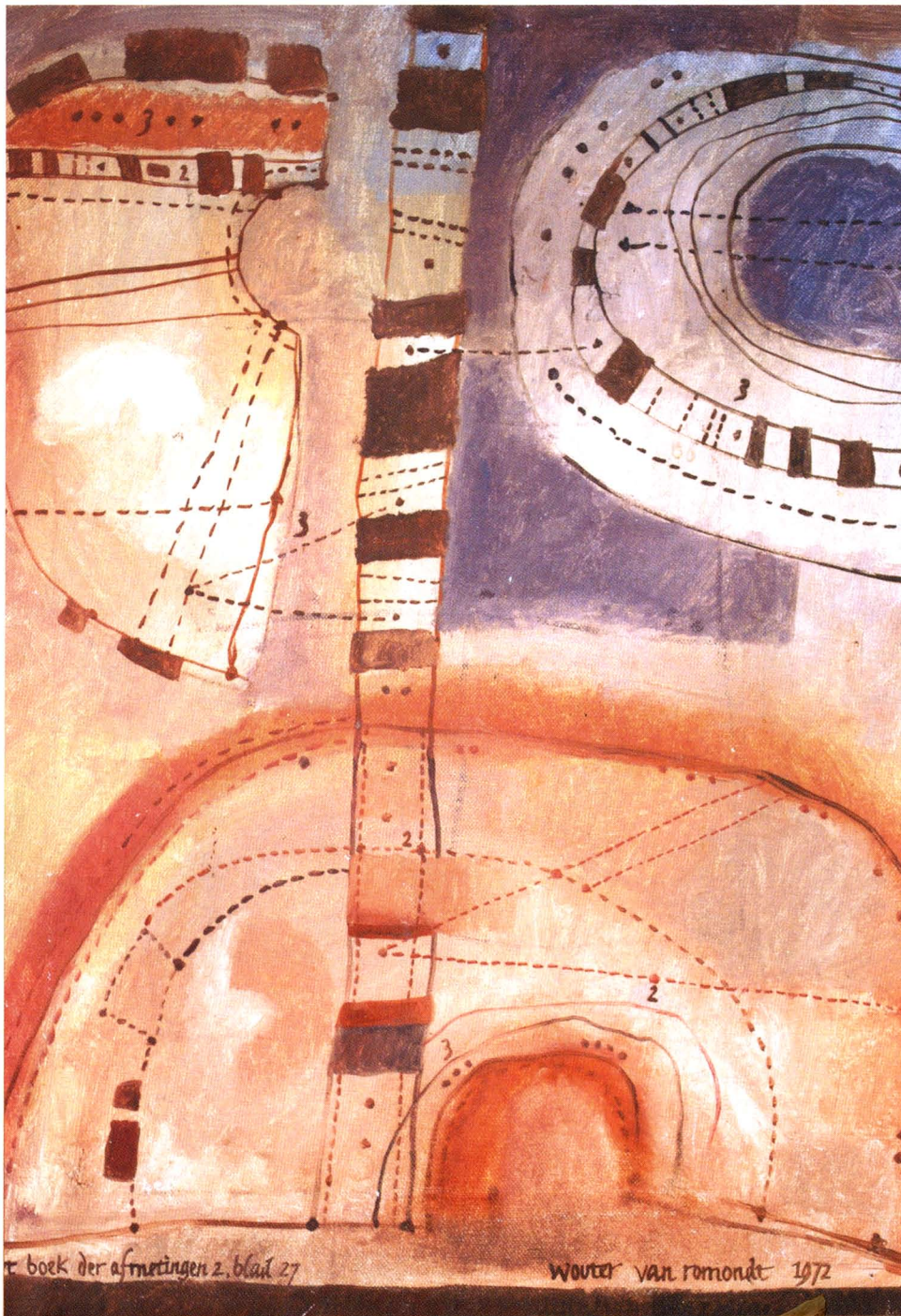


Jean-Georges Pandellis
"Landscape at Grape Field", 1939
National Library Aruba

An art history of the

Aruban Landscape

by Stan Kuiperi


Wouter van Romondt

*"The Book of Measures 2,
page 27", 1972*

Collection M.van Romondt, Aruba

donkeys, iguanas, rattlesnakes, blue lizards and wara-wara falcons roam.

The southern coastal area is even more varied. This is where Aruba's world-famous ultra-white, fine sand beaches are found, lined with palm trees. Small and sleepy fisherman villages, beachfront restaurants and reefs line the southeastern coast. Often one finds clusters of mangrove trees that grow in quiet, secluded areas fully protected from wave action that create their own ecology.

From the onset of Aruba's art history in the 1930s, these landscapes inspired those first amateur painters who ventured out to the countryside to capture the views of the island. These paintings were traditionally

realistic. The advantage of this to us now is that all these early works represent a historical collection of fairly accurate images of how most of rural Aruba used to look from the 1930s to the 1950s. In other words, most of these landscapes have now been transformed and only live on in Aruba's art history.

One of the first permanently settled painters was **Jean Georges Pandellis** (1896-1965), who came to Aruba in the 1930s after traveling the world. He produced a vast number of works in his 35 years on the island, and he can also be credited with teaching landscape painting to a group of other younger painters whom he influenced strongly. Pandellis used several painting techniques (thick oil paint and water colors) to capture many existing landscapes all over the island. His painting reproduced here is from 1939, and it represents a sweeping landscape with sea grape trees and a view of the southernmost coastal area of Aruba near Boca Grandi.

One of Pandellis' most dedicated students was **Julie Oduber-Quigley** (1934-2000). She had settled in Aruba and had taken up painting lessons from Pandellis in the 1960s. She would quickly learn to capture Aruba's central interior in brightly colored oil paintings. Her idyllic landscapes are all about the Aruban countryside, as remembered only by today's older generations. Her paintings are almost melancholic memories of the quiet rural areas in which the blooming bougainvilleas, the song of the colorful Trupial bird and the softly caressing trade winds are frozen in time forever.

But there is also a completely different side to the Aruban landscape. Its northern desert-like appearance inspires the visitor to mystic contemplation. Its huge volcanic boulders and the still undeciphered prehistoric rock drawings from Aruba's Amerindian inhabitants are the stuff of legends. A new generation of internationally trained modern artists who manifested themselves from the 1970s on, based a great deal of their artwork on these aspects instead of on the traditional views.

Wouter van Romondt (1944), one of Aruba's first modern artists, transformed the Aruban landscape into mythology. In his paintings, the Aruban environment morphs into pure earth colors, geometrical and natural forms, and a symbolic visual language consisting of lines and characters that only the initiated can understand. Van Romondt was among the first to use a modern, abstract visual language to interpret the Aruban landscape, initiating a new genre in local art history.

Artist and art teacher **Stan Kuiperi** (1954), inspired by Van Romondt since his own school days, ranks among the most outspoken contemporary painters in Aruba. He has consequently created abstract Aruban landscapes since the 1980s and has taken landscape painting to another level. Kuiperi states "In my work, the landscape is a surreal space where personal and collective experiences take place, where culture and nature vie for survival". Kuiperi's original artworks make people aware of both the beauty and the fragility of the Aruban natural environment and of the fact that mankind remains a part of nature.

For information on viewing works by these artists, e-mail artland_aruba@yahoo.com



Stan Kuiperi

"Beloved Earth: Malmok" 2007

Collection M-L. van Romondt, Curaçao

"...these landscapes inspired those first amateur painters who ventured out to the countryside to capture the views of the island."